

# **Supporting Military Families – A Comparative Study in Social Support Arrangements for Military Families (Theoretical Dimensions & Empirical Comparison between Countries)**

**Dr R. Moelker, Ms. M. Andres MSc, Ms. G.J.A. Poot BA**

Royal Netherlands Military Academy  
Postbox 90002 4800PA Breda  
THE NETHERLANDS

[r.moelker@nlda.nl](mailto:r.moelker@nlda.nl) / [m.d.andres@nlda.nl](mailto:m.d.andres@nlda.nl) / [gja.poot@nlda.nl](mailto:gja.poot@nlda.nl)

## **ABSTRACT**

*Seeking social support is one of the ways people use to cope with stressful situations. Sometimes people have extensive social networks and do not need support from the organization. Sometimes the organization can stimulate and facilitate informal family support groups. The effectiveness of social support has been much discussed by many scholars (Bell, Segal & Rice, 1995; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Rosen & Moghadam, 1990). Desylva and Gal (1996) already started exploring solutions in order to overcome the conflict between families and the military organization. They focussed mainly on family structures. We hope to bring the discussion a little bit further by focusing on structures of social support networks.*

*From our research concerning social support certain findings were replicated over and over again (Moelker & Cloin, 1997). In the 2001-survey we again found that 64% agreed to the statement 'the support from family, friends and neighbors is more useful to me than the family support rendered by the army'. 39% thinks that family support group meetings are useful, but 63% never visited them. In general family support is very much appreciated, but people tend to think that it is more useful to others than to themselves. These findings raise the question how family support should be organized so that it is as efficient and effective as can be. Exchange theory can provide an answer to this question whilst taking into account that the needs of individuals will differ. What is effective and efficient support to one individual will not be same for someone else.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

We know much about military families, the way they respond to living in 'garrison'-conditions or to deployment of the soldier in the family. We know much about the stress they experience and their coping behaviour. The psychological theory that concerns the military family (mainly stress theory) is quite well developed. Social psychology makes a contribution with research into the field of social support. In contrast, sociological theory only delivers a very thin description of the phenomenon 'military family'. The best sociological concepts which were applied to the military family stem from the work of Lewis Coser on the 'greedy institution'. It was Segal who first saw the importance of this concept for military families (Coser, 1974; Segal, 1986; Moelker and Cloin, 1996). This work is important, but it is only a beginning. There is a need for, as anthropologists call it, 'thick' sociological description of the military family. Coser and Segal are the giants on whose shoulders we should stand, whose work we have to elaborate empirically and theoretically.

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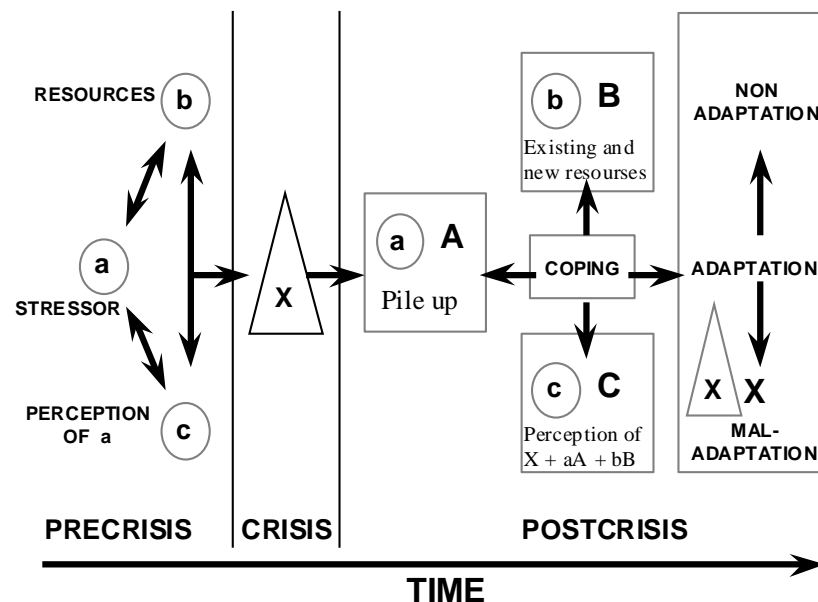
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Our knowledge of family affairs is augmenting still, but do we really understand the military family? It appears that research is often based on quantitative data collection methods. Theory is dominated by psychology. Knowledge and insights from other disciplines like sociology, anthropology or even economics (There is research on military families that departs from the economic perspective. An example is Lakhani, 1994) are seldom integrated. The knowledge that is being produced does not always offer new insights or better understanding. New theoretical approaches that depart from interdisciplinary research is necessary.

In section 2 the psychological state of the art in family research is presented in a nutshell. In the third section some ideas for integrating sociological theory into the already existing body of knowledge will be discussed. These ideas combine much of previous findings from research and theoretical reflection by authors/researchers in the field of family research.

## 2. THE MODEL FOR FAMILY STRESS

The prevailing model of stress among families, the so-called double ABC-X model (Hill, 1949; McCubbin and Patterson, 1982) is the fruit of military psychological research. Family therapy and ideas on the operation of stress in civilian families are also based on this research. Surveys among the female population in general reveal that a separation period of this kind comes in third place on the list of the most stressful events (Homes and Rahe, 1967). Only the death of a partner or divorce score higher. That means that every military family experiences a fairly high level of stress during the period that the serviceman is deployed abroad. Separation is stressful in it self. This becomes clear when the deployment is doubled in length (one year in stead of the normal length of ½ year) as is the case with IFOR. Spouses of IFOR soldiers reported that the length of deployment is stressor number one. Spouses of soldiers participating in deployments of normal length were more concerned about safety of their partner (Bartone & Bartone, 1997).



**Figure 1: McCubbin and Patterson's double ABC-X model.**

The ABC-X model for family stress, developed shortly after the Second World War by Hill (1949), is attractive because of its simplicity. In the model A stands for the stressful event, B stands for the resources people have for solving their problems (financial resources, the help of friends and family, help from the organisation etc.). Because an event may be much more problematical for one person than it is for another,

the model also includes subjective perception. The subjective definition of the stressor is indicated by the letter C. X stands for the crisis, the disorganisation and chaos that is the result of the combination of A, B and C.

McCubbin and Patterson's double ABC-X model (1982; 46) is an improvement of Hill's original model. This takes into account the pile-up of problems as a dynamic process. It is the last straw that breaks the camel's back. In figure 1 the doubling of the problem is indicated by the squares with the double letters in them. Over the course of time, one problem has been piled up on top of the other. A similar doubling may also occur with regard to the resources that people have available to themselves and with regard to the perception of the problem. The first problem is as it were perceived to be more stressful because of the way in which the second problem is perceived. The fact that this doubling may result in a greater crisis follows from the logic of the model (the last square in figure 1). In other words it is double As, Bs and Cs that ultimately affect the capacity to cope with the problems and the level of adaptation.

This coping behaviour is defined as "the management of a stressful event or situation by the family as a unit, with no detrimental effects on any individual in that family. Coping is the family's ability to manage, not eradicate or eliminate, the stressful event" (Gelles, 1995; 429). The ability or inability to apply coping mechanisms results in the ultimate adaptation to the crisis situation. Alongside all the numerous negative coping strategies which do not solve the problem (drink, sleeping tablets, denial or flight) there are seven positive coping strategies (McCubbin, 1979):

- keeping the family ties intact;
- developing self-confidence and self-esteem;
- developing social support;
- developing a positive attitude;
- learning about a problem;
- reducing tension by for example hobbies, talking, crying;
- introducing balance in the coping strategies.

Military wives cope better than civilian wives. An American research by Eastman, Archer and Ball (1990) demonstrated that navy families scored higher on cohesiveness, expressiveness and the level in which a family is organised than civilian families on the shore. Families that can be characterised as low stress families are as a rule also more cohesive and better at expressing feelings. There is less conflict in low stress families and they are better organised.

Stressors and stress reactions do not remain the same in the deployment cycle (preparation, during deployment and after deployment / marital reconciliation). What is perceived stressful before the deployment differs much from what is perceived stressful after the deployment. The reason for these changes is the fact that there are phases or stages in the way spouses react to deployment. The stages wives go through are: initial shock, departure, emotional disintegration, recovery and stabilisation, anticipation of the homecoming, reunion and reintegration / stabilisation (De Soir, 1997).

An important topic in international research is the time after the deployment (Wood, Scarville & Gravino, 1995, Wouters, 1997) Successful reintegration of the soldier and his/her family are essential in developing a positive attitude toward future deployment. Successful marital reconciliation is important for the motivation of many soldiers. Many studies report that wives have found new confidence in themselves and that the relation between the spouses has become more close. In a Belgian research 60% of the couples said that they stood the test and are "stronger and closer, because both partners have become more autonomous and mature" (Wauters, 1997: 23).

There is much more to tell about the findings in the psychological research tradition, but most of these findings are in some way connected to or elaboration's of the basic model given by the ABC-X model.

### **3. BRINGING SOCIOLOGY IN! PROPOSAL FOR FURTHERING SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY IN THE STUDY OF MILITARY FAMILIES**

Much psychological research has been done on the basis of the double ABCX-model. One of the topics in this model is social support. The effectiveness of social support is discussed in many articles (Rosen & Moghadam, 1990; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Bell, Segal & Rice, 1995; Moelker & Cloin, 1997). Social support is one of the possible sources people have at their disposal. Though the concept of social support is not strange to the sociology of the family, it is really a concept that is derived from social psychology. Sociologists should use the findings from (social) psychology, but they should also develop their own discipline.

The best way to develop the theory in the sociological tradition is to return to classical sociological questions. One of the most promising questions is derived from the work of Durkheim. Durkheim's work departs from the question "how is society possible"? In Durkheim's theory key concepts are 'the division of labour' and 'organic' and 'mechanic solidarity'. Durkheim's primary interest in the question how a society could be built is relevant to family research. Many scientists view the family as the corner-stone of society. A relative of Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, posed a related question that has also become a classic.

Mauss (1990) concentrated on gifts as a way of community building. Many other authors followed this line of reasoning. The discussion between Claude Lévi-Strauss and George Homans on the topic of the cross cousin marriage has become famous. The discussion is centred round the question whether gifts contribute to solidarity in society because they promote exchange relations (and mutual obligations to return the gift). According to Berting and Phillipsen (1960) Homans was right; the kinship system was based on exchange.

There are many ways in which the above can be elaborated. As an example for future research I will elaborate the question how support relations emerge. *Which types of support relations are most effective in rendering support to the military families during deployment situations and what is the way in which types of support relations come into being?* This question is about the way in which networks of support relations are constructed and therefore it is about the ways of promoting a kind of Durkheimian solidarity that not only keeps society together, but (and to the research this is more important) that keeps the family together. The question is very much connected to the discussion by Mauss, Levi Strauss and Homans. The key concepts that answer the question "how do support relations come into being" are derived from the work of these giants in sociology.

#### **3.1 Structural developments**

The structure of support networks for families depends on changes in society at large. Three kinds of change are important. First of all the change from a closed society towards an open society. Second, a change towards openness of the family. A third major change is a change from a collectivist to a more individualist orientation. Of course these changes are connected.

The first major change in society refers to the openness of the society. Achievement has taken the place of ascription as a way of advancement in social life. Not race, nobility or sex is most important to stratification but the achievements of the individual. This societal change is supported by the ideologies of liberalism and individualism. The level of openness in society is much discussed in stratification research. Even in our modern society not everybody has equal opportunities. But the degree of openness has certainly augmented in comparison with society as it existed before world war II (for a discussion on the openness of the industrial society see Moelker, 1992).

Family structures have developed from open to closed families, and are under the influence of modernisation opening up again. In traditional societies family structures are open, whilst the society is a

closed society based on the ascribed rank in the social hierarchy. The openness is a result of the extended form of the family. Grand parents, parents, children and often uncles, aunts, nephews and nieces are living together in an economical unit which is open to all members of the family. As the society began to open up and gave people chances to rise in their social status on the basis of achievement, families became closed units, often described as the nuclear family. Father, mother and children formed this nucleus which lived in one house. In these families traditionally the father went out working and the mother looks after the children. Recently authors point at developments towards a greater openness in the family structure due to the fact that both partners participate in working life, and have friends of their own. Some sociologists even predict that circles of friends will become more important than family ties (Weeda, 1991). This prediction is rejected by others (Straver, et al, 1994; v/d Akker et al., 1992) because of the fact that the nuclear family still is the most dominant form of family life.

The above mentioned changes could not be without the process of individualisation. The shift from collectivism towards individualism has been described by many authors (from Tonnies to Habermas, Giddens and Beck). Individualisation stimulates women to participate in working life. Legal and financial regulations in the Netherlands have in the 20<sup>th</sup> century been beneficial to traditional families<sup>1</sup>. Individualisation in legislation results in equal rights but also obliges women to make their own living<sup>2</sup>. The nuclear family may be the dominant form of family life in the Netherlands, but families are not traditional any more in the sense of the father in his role of provider and income-earner and the mother in her role of caring and nurturing.

### **3.2 A typology in social support relations**

We can distinguish four support relations on the basis of the dependency-axis and the individualized-communitarian continuum. Dependency and independence form the extremes on the dependency-axis. This axis refers to the relationship with the providers of support. The second axis refers to two traditions in social exchange theory (Ekeh, 1974), one is individualist, and the other is communitarian. The first is rooted in the work of George Homans who departed from an almost economic individualist conceptual framework. Each gift or service has to be reciprocated by the recipient by a service in return, a gift or money. The communitarian tradition builds on the concepts of Durkheim, Mauss and Lévi-Strauss. This tradition states for instance that even in economics there are communitarian issues - like trust - that are essential to exchange transactions. Exchange cannot solely be analyzed by using the calculative logic of contributions versus retributions.

The two structure-variables 'dependency' and 'individualism-communitarian' together form a taxonomy that defines four types of social support networks; professionalized social support relations, institutionalized social support networks, exchange relations and social support networks on the basis of generalized reciprocity (see figure 2).

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<sup>1</sup> Families with two incomes were disproportionately taxed, till the sixties married women were not allowed to work, etc.

<sup>2</sup> The Netherlands still have the lowest labour market participation (about 50%) in Europe. This low degree of participation is in great part explainable by differences in tax systems in the past, cultural norms (only in poor proletarianised families the women worked), and legislation.



	Relationship with provider of support	
	Dependent	Independent
Individualized	Professionalized	Exchange relations
Communitarian	Institutionalized	Generalized reciprocity

**Figure 2: Structure variables determining social support network types.**

### **3.2.1 Professionalized social support relations**

The advantage of professional support lies in the economy of scale. A small group of professionals can give help to a big number of clients. The second advantage is that the professionals are specialised in special services like psychiatry or social work. Specialisation makes it possible to give aid and adequately render services that fit the needs of the people. An other important characteristic of professionalism is the trusting relationship between helper and client. From Kramer and Tyler (1996) we know that trust is important because the client has to be sure that information about health and/or personal circumstances are safe with the helper.

A disadvantage is that clients can become dependent on professionals like psychologists, social workers or members of the medical profession. Services by professional helpers are reciprocated by money, insurances or paid for by the military organization. This dependency arises because spouses are isolated and do not connect to other army wives, nor to family or friends. When confronted with problems the spouse cannot cope with, there is no other resort than professional workers. Hence the size of the support network is small, there are not many people the spouse can turn to for help. The marital quality and the authority relation between family members may vary within each family but when there is need for professional support it is likely that there are problems regarding the family relations. Commitment is limited to the family only. One of the problems that might be heavier on these type of families is the conflict of the military organization with the military family. Whilst the family is inner directed and highly ‘greedy’ the justified demands of the military organization regarding the duties of the serviceman may not be accepted by the spouse. Especially deployments will lead to a sharp conflict between family and military organization. Support from professionals is effective but costly. When emergency situations arise, professional support will probably encounter capacity problems.

### **3.2.2 Institutionalized social support networks**

The fundamentals of institutionalized social support networks were discussed in the section on greedy institutions (Segal, 1986). The networks are embedded in traditional military norms and values such as the value that is placed on community. This type of network is likely to occur in the ‘institution’-model (Moskos, 1977) where communitarianism is strong and the individual is dependent on the military community for social support. Support is based on a contribution-retribution basis towards the whole community. There is no strict accounting of given or gotten support. Often the military community is – to a certain degree - isolated from civilian society (its a closed inner directed community). This community is characterized by strong social control, a high commitment to community from its members and hierarchic relationships. Social control takes care of people who tend to behave as free riders. The military community serves as a surrogate family of the extended form. The family itself is also traditional and is

characterized by patriarchal authority relations. Wives usually don't have jobs, but devote their time keeping house and raising the children. The status of the spouse is derived from the rank of their husband. The network size can be very large which contributes to effectiveness and efficiency of the support rendered, but this support is only effective and efficient when the spouse accepts the traditional 'institution'-character. Support given demands great effort from the individual who sacrifices him/her self for the benefit of the community. The support, that is organised in this military community is effective as long as the traditional military community remains intact. When the 'institution'-character is not accepted, there will be a sharp conflict between family and military organization. In contrast to the type described above the military organization is highly greedy.

### **3.2.3 Direct exchange relations**

In direct exchange relationships individual spouses bargain for their own position in a way that is ruled by the immediate quid pro quo principle. Self interest leads to calculative behaviour in which the costs of helping is being weighed against the profits of services that will be given in return. The immediacy is the cause for a low need for trust. You know that you are not cheated because the service in return is immediate (Mauss, 1990). Calculations are made whether or not investments in relationships are profitable considering the costs. The support network – if it deserves that name – is very small and is structured in dyads. There can be several dyads, relations of support between provider and recipient, but the number of dyads will be limited due to the investments and costs needed to maintain the dyads. Maintaining an extended network would rapidly become very expensive. Especially when the investments are not in balance with the profits (the services in return; we are talking of all kinds of support, from material to emotional support). The principle of reciprocity (quit pro quo) is at work here. The actual value of the services/support in the exchange relation depend on the balance of power, the scarcity of the service and the subjective need for a special kind of service (some women value emotional support more than help in the garden, but the reverse is also possible). Status and authority relations with others depend on what the others can offer and the 'market value' of the spouse. In situations where A has a great need for a certain kind of support that is scarce and/or is valued very high by A and the service can only be provided for by B, B will have much power and can ask for a service in return from A that has a value that surmounts the value of the service given by B. Commitment is primarily to one self. The attitude towards the military organization is not conflictuous provided that there is a balance between 'give and take'. The dyads are not very effective and efficient support systems. When someone experiences a problematic situation over a considerable period of time, her 'market value' will diminish and she will lose attractiveness as exchange partner. In fact the dyad structure will dissolve and slide down into a professionalized support relationship, meaning that there will soon not be another alternative for support than to knock on the doors of professional workers.

### **3.2.4 Generalized reciprocity**

Social support networks based on generalized reciprocity (Sahlins, 1978) combine a communitarian character with a great independence of participating individuals. In fact the strength of the support network is derived from what Granovetter (1973) called the strength of weak ties: there is a rather large community of friendship circles with members who support each other, but the ties between the members are not so strong that they would cause the support network to become greedy or threaten the independence of the individuals in the network. There are many weak ties between people to make the network strong. The exchange principle is not based on direct reciprocation, sometimes helpers may never be reciprocated. 'This is not to say that handing over things in such form, even to 'loved ones' generates no counter-obligation. But the counter is not stipulated by time, quantity, or quality: the expectation of reciprocity is indefinite' (Sahlins, 1978). This results into a behavior that can be described as citizenship behavior. People making contributions to society are not altruistic but they act from the well understood self interest that one day they might receive support from someone with whom they perhaps were not personally acquainted.



That economic rational exchange knows its limits, was proven by Titmuss. He studied the motives of people to become a blood donor “The choice of blood as an illustration and case study was no idly academic thought; it was deliberate (...) Blood as a living tissue may now constitute in Western societies one of the ultimate tests of where the ‘social’ begins and the ‘economic’ ends (Titmuss, 1970: 158). The gift of blood without pursuit of gain is not so much based on exchange but on an abstract form of trust: the trust that, when helping other people, one shall get help to. Maybe one gets help from a third person one did not previously know. With blood transfusions this is very common, one seldom knows who is the blood donor. This sacrifice of blood stands against the direct exchange and is an example of ‘generalised reciprocity’. But generalised reciprocity is only possible when there is enough trust in the will of others to help. The exchange principle is of the kind “helper-help” which has shown its effectiveness in many self help groups as Alcoholics Anonymous (Harberden, P. Van, 19..). As in self help groups the helper helps him/her self by helping others. Helping others even solves his/her own problems. Women who share the same fate, feel better and are better able to cope with their problems when they help a friend (emotionally or with practical problems like watching over children. This system of generalised reciprocity is based on well understood self interest. The people that participate in the system understand that giving support is profitable in ‘the long run’ because at some point of time others (maybe even persons one is not acquainted with) will give support to them.

In these network not every person needs to be acquainted with each other. One can imagine that A supports B, who will at her/his turn support C, who perhaps in time will help D and maybe D will help A. A does not need to be acquainted with C. In this way the size of the network may become much larger than other types of networks because there are many people who can in some way be part of this circle of friends. In this way the circle of friends has the advantage of scale which gives the support system supplementary facilities.

Relationships within the network but also within the family are egalitarian. The relations between network members are affective, friendly. Power distances between network members are small. Spouses derive their status from their own occupation or their personality. The power distance between the spouses are likewise small. The spouses function independently because both of the spouses have jobs and both participate equally in the household. The spouses have friends of their own. When the military organization and the family both believe the relation to be a two-sided affair the chance that the family-military relation is conflictuous is low. Support is offered on basis of friendship without the expectation of immediate reciprocation, which causes the support network to be stable. Prolonged support is enabled because support is offered without the expectation of immediate reciprocation. The friendship circles giving support in fact very much resemble the volunteer groups or ‘home front groups’ in the armed forces. In short, social support networks based on generalized reciprocity are effective and efficient.

**Table 1: Ideal typical approach of social support networks**

<b>Variables / social support network</b>	<b>Professionalized</b>	<b>Institutionalized</b>	<b>Exchange relations</b>	<b>Generalized reciprocity</b>
<i>Dependent - Independent</i>	Dependent of professional care	Dependent of military community	Independent : bargaining for own position	Independent: strength of weak ties
<i>Individualized – communitarian</i>	Individualized : individual versus bureaucracy	Communitarian: service to community	Individualized: quid pro quo	Communitarian: citizenship behavior
<i>Network structure</i>	Individualized / isolated	Military community serves as extended family	Dyad structure	Friendship circles
<i>Network size</i>	Small – isolated	Large	Small	Medium to large
<i>Status spouse</i>	Does not apply : the family is separated from military community	Depending on rank of the serviceman	Depending on the possibilities to reciprocate	Depending on own occupation, personality
<i>Authority relation within the family</i>	Varies for all families	Patriarchal / traditional	Depending on what the other can offer	Egalitarian
<i>Commitment</i>	To family only	To military community	To one self	To friends and loved ones
<i>Greediness : conflict family – military organization</i>	Family is most greedy : sharp conflict when the organization demands deployment	Military organization is most greedy : sharp conflict when spouses do not accept traditionalism	Low conflict if balanced: Give and take kind of balance	Low conflict if balanced: balanced if there is mutual acceptance: ‘a two sided affair’
<i>Effectivity and efficiency of the support network</i>	Professional help is effective if spouse cannot cope, not efficient because of costs and capacity problems	Effective and efficient if ‘institution’-character is accepted	Not effective and efficient: when families are in trouble they are not attractive exchange partners	Effective and efficient: on basis of friendship support is offered without expectation of immediate reciprocation

### **3.3 Empirical study of support systems**

The 2001-survey makes specific the kind of support spouses want from the military organization. They have a need to be informed and communicate with their loved ones (see also Ender, 1995). But spouses are not much in need for financial or material support. Only 26% answered 'I need mainly material support' (the answering categories 'a little bit' and 'a lot' were taken together). Only 26% needed professional support. 64% stated that they needed mainly emotional support by family or friends, or both.

The survey also showed a remarkable preference for the more communitarian forms of support. The item 'in our community we should help each other without wanting a favor in return' was agreed to by 68%. Only 15% agreed to the question 'If I help someone, I expect him/her to help me too'. 'Help comes from unexpected persons' was agreed to by 75%. Only 24% agreed to the statement 'Rendering support cannot be left to amateurs'. Most popular was 'People have to care about each other'. The item was supported by 86%. These items proved all in favor of communitarian forms of support networks. Both the 'institutionalized' and 'generalized reciprocity' forms of networks were popular. Individualistic approaches – exchange and professional support – proved least popular.

When looking at actual emotional support it became clear that the social support networks in the civilian surroundings of the spouses are the best used support networks. The most popular conversational partners to whom one could open one's heart were parents (73% could have this kind of conversations with the parents) and parents in law (57%), friends (85%), colleagues (50%) and neighbors (42%). These kind of comforting conversations with colleagues of the deployed partner and with other military wives were much less likely (27 and 34%). These findings lead us to believe that social support networks based on generalized reciprocity are more important in the Netherlands than institutionalized social support networks.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

From the theoretical discussion the main conclusion is that there are correlations between the form of the support relation in terms of exchange, dependency, the support network structure, quality, power distances and authority, commitment, status, conflict between the military organisation and the military family and effectivity and efficiency of the support relation. It is difficult to hypothesise a causal relation between the position of the support relation in the dependency – individualism/communitarisme typology and the other elements that characterise the support relation. But the ideal typical approach used above makes it plausible that the four support relations that vary in the mixture of "dependency" and "communitarism" result in four different kind societal helping patterns. These societal patterns are meaningful life worlds to the people in it. These life worlds are their self constructed 'helping societies'.

Differences in support relations and differences in 'exchange-sacrifice' result in different life worlds. But the question also was, which types of support relations are more effective and efficient. The answer to this question is more difficult than the analytical text above suggests. Every support relation can under certain conditions be efficient and effective. Traditional military families develop efficient and effective networks when their culture and surroundings are traditional. Dyads are efficient and effective when they succeed in maintaining enough relations that can participate in exchange. The isolated military family basing its behaviour on exchange and the friendship circles based on generalised reciprocity can also be efficient and effective. In a modern society support relations based on generalised reciprocity seem to be more likely to be effective and efficient.

For army policy makers the problem is how they should match the support to the support relation. The army does not need to offer support when for instance dyads are functioning well. The 'market' of demand and supply of services will take care of all needs. When isolated families function well, they will solve their own problems. For traditional families, community support lends a helping hand. In friendship

circles friends take care of each other on the basis of generalised reciprocity. Matching the support to the support relation means for the isolated families that the armed forces have to provide a safety net of professional helpers. In the case of the traditional family the armed forces have to stimulate 'traditional' communal happenings which reinforce community feeling and organisation commitment, like parties, ceremonies, activities that integrate spouses and children in the military community. Dyads can only be supported by providing sufficient freedom so that they can establish a market of demand and supply of mutual services. Friendship circles have much use for facilitating policy of the armed forces. Friendship circles have a capacity of self organisation but they often need a little help to get started and facilities (like accommodation where women can meet each other, facilities for publishing a newsletter or establishing a telephone tree) that enables the autonomous work of the friendship circle possible.

All types of support relations are possible at the same time. For some individuals the traditional military family is a life world that is a reality. For others the friendship circle constitutes a reality. This means that the armed forces have to be facilitating towards all types of support relations. It will be difficult for the armed forces to supply the diversified array of supportive activities towards the support relations. The secret of matching support to the support relations is that support delivered by the armed forces has to be appropriate. One cannot force a group of individuals that function as a friendship circle to consume the kind of support that is appropriate for the isolated military family. Professional support would in this example be contra productive and arouse feelings of aversion. To be able to match the right kind of support to the right support relation the armed forces need to be able to provide all the above mentioned kinds of support.

The elaboration of theory in this paper towards a matrix in which support relations are idealtypically described, offers possibilities for further research. It is possible to work out new hypotheses that have a theoretical fundament. The theory presented in this paper only has the function to inspire and stimulate the formulation of new hypotheses. There are ample possibilities to work on these hypotheses in interdisciplinary and international research.

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